

Mr. Erwin Knoll
The Progressive
409 West Main St.,
Madison, WI 53703

5/23/88

Dear Erwin Knoll,

Yours is an eloquent statement of sincerely-held belief but I think it is also two-dimensional, lacks contact with controlling realities, and it misstates something I said. In justification of the Progressive's policy you say something I ask you to reconsider because it is, I believe, quite incorrect: "We, as Americans, are not responsible for the ghastly crimes committed in the Arab world. We are responsible for the crimes committed by the government of Israel, which is sustained and supported by the U.S. Government and bankrolled by our tax dollars."

In this you represent that Israel, in that part of the world, is unique in both American support and American responsibility. Going back to Mossadegh, this is not also true of Iran? Not true of Egypt? Turkey and Greece? Pakistan? And so many others, not overlooking Lebanon, whose current troubles were magnified, if not commenced all over again, beginning with the Eisenhower administration, which also prepared Egypt for its wars against Israel. Is there really any part of the world that is not in some degree within your words that I quote above? Not Jordan, both directly and indirectly? We are not currently arming most of the Muslim governments that are at a state of war with Israel? And did not most of the few not getting U.S. help directly well-off financially because of earlier but recent U.S. help?

I did not spell out all that is so terribly complex about the situation in the Middle East, with which, in general, you agree. One is that two peoples can make legitimate claims to the same land. My reference to Muslim fratricide was not merely to point out that your policy is discriminatory but to call to your attention that until there is some one or group that can make a meaningful and enforceable agreement with Israel, there is no Palestinians with which it can make an agreement that will permit it to live within secure borders. You do make vague references to recent statements by some of the PLO, but given a chance to impart some credibility to these statements, like changing the PLO's charter, they are as utterly meaningless and treacherous as the evasiveness and circumlocutions that characterize every one of the fairly frequent appearances of Arafat I've seen on TV. (i.e. drive Israel into the sea)

I did not refer to "negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians." I referred to any kind of negotiations involving Palestine beginning with the proposals of the British Peel Commission, which I believe date to 1937. That would have given the Palestinians west of the Jordan all but about 10 percent of original Palestine. You, like most other editors, refer to only what is west of the Jordan as Palestine but in fact more than half of Palestine was, without Arab or Palestinian protest, used by perfidious Albion for the creation of Trans-Jordan. Jordan today is mostly Palestinian and only its refusal to accept refugees keeps it from being even more Palestinian. (Did you, by the way, consider that you lost your homeland when you moved from Washington to Madison? No more does any Palestinian living west of the Jordan lose his by moving or being moved into Jordan, the name of which Hussein changed to fuzz over the realities of the creation of his state.)

What you are espousing is really another holocaust, and Hitler's was far from the first of which Jews were the victims. There is no survival, treaties or no treaties, for an Israel as little as ten miles wide with such enemies as Syria on its border and with the policies of all Muslim governments to permit and assist attacks on Israel from their territory.

Why do you think that, save for Egypt, all the Muslim governments have, for 40 years, refused to make treaties of peace with Israel? Why do you think none would accept refugees to replace the Jews they permitted to leave, being careful to keep

all the Jewish property those Jews could not carry with them? Only to misuse the refugees as they have been misused, and I don't recall any comment on this kind of humanitarian concern in the Progressive.

Shifts of population during your lifetime involving the USSR, Poland, Germany, Pacific areas and even between Iraq and Iran are normal, as this kind of thing, whether or not one likes it, has been normal throughout history, are right and proper; but when Israel is involved there is a different standard? There is one difference: Palestinians moving (which was prevented in most instances) or being moved into another part of their Palestine would remain in part of Palestine, now called Jordan. But that was prevented, as was migration - even innocent movement - into Egypt.

Violence begets violence and Arab violence is responded to by Israeli violence. When Israel established itself against the attack of combined Arab power, including, going back to your words that I quote above, Jordan, financed by Britain, which was certainly supported by U.S. tax dollars, the defeated powers agreed to an armistice but not to a peace treaty. When Israel offered to give up some of the land it took in that war, not any Arab government and not anyone even pretending to speak for any Palestinians would even talk to Israel. Instead they supported Palestinian/PLO attacks on civilian Israeli targets, often Arabs and most often women, children and old men. It didn't end until Israel was able to diminish it but it still is not ended.

In your keeping up with events there, did you come on any Palestinian clamor for an independent state in the Gaza strip when Egypt occupied it for 20 years? Or in the West Bank after Jordan took it by force of arms? No, and there was such a clamor only against Israel. Israel which tried to do for those Arabs what Egypt and Jordan did not do to ~~prevent~~ improve their conditions. And those humanitarian Arab governments, when Israeli proposals for further improvements came up at the United Nations, blocked them. The Arab powers saw to it that the refugees would suffer and suffer so that they could and would become, as Egypt radio said often enough, a major weapon against Israel.

The policy of the Muslim world, going back to Mohammed, has been for the end of any Israeli state. (His began, according to Werner, to whose book I referred you, when he could not take the Jewish religion over.) Why else do you really think that save for Egypt, no Muslim power has signed any peace treaty? Why else do you think Sadat was assassinated? Or Abdullah before him when Abdullah was merely talking to Israelis?

You deceive yourself if you believe that were Israel to come to an agreement with Arab it would give Israel any security, have any real meaning. He can't control either the Palestinians who are supported by Khoumeni (but not controlled by him) or the gangs like Abu Nidals. The Nidals are, according to an Arab doctoral candidate at Georgetown, whose article you may have read in the Nation several months ago, assassinating every Palestinian who speaks to any Israeli and all their own defected members. Who tired of killing, who wanted no further responsibility for it. Moreover, were the PLO to reach an agreement with Israel, it has every reason to believe that it would immediately lose its not ~~an~~ inconsiderable income from the Arab powers that finance it but have no charity for Arab refugees who suffer so much.

These are some of the reasons I say that what you said is only two-dimensional and without contact with grim realities.

Sometimes we have to reassess some of our dearly-held beliefs. As a life-long pacifist, with a clear record of this in college, I nonetheless enlisted in the war against Hitler. And when I got a medical discharge I rejected a better-paying magazine job to ~~continue~~ continue efforts against Hitler as a civilian in the government.

That I have no use for the Begins and Shamirs, who were terrorists, does not mean that I have to regard each and every belief they had and have about what is required for the security of Israel as a state. However, I think you are unfair in what you say of their terrorism and in equating them with South Africa. With the single exception of a single retaliation, which all others then opposed, they did not terrorize Arabs

per se. They did use this method against the British, who could not make any claim to a right to a homeland in Palestine. Nothing like the Arab atrocity at the Olympics, of the bombings of the Rome and Vienna airports, of the piracy of the Achille Lauro, nor, to the best of my knowledge, a single incident like the murder of Leon Klinghoffer, an American. No bombings of buses or places of worship. No slaughters of Arabs while at worship. (Remember the recent incident in Turkey, which like the rest, has nothing to do with establishing any homeland, which the bombing of the King David Hotel certainly did.)

Unlike the comparison you make, Arabs living in Israel have about all the rights anyone else has there. They don't have to bear arms, although they in some instances can, they can and do have their own political parties and they are elected to the Knesset. Even to Shamir and Begin you are excessive and unfair.

When Hussein took the West Bank the only improvement he started that I am aware of is building himself a new castle on a Jerusalem height. I understand it remains unfinished as a monument to him and his policies. Once Israel had responsibility for that land it established four Arab universities. Among other things. (Is there one in Soweto, which may have a much larger population?)

You assume that all the Arabs living in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank support the current violence there and that is not true. Those practicing the violence have terrorized those who are not part of it, particularly those who kept businesses open and those who went to jobs inside Israel. Whether you like or approve it or not, under international law Israel has the obligation of preserving peace and tranquility in the land under its control. This includes for those who do not support the present violence, which I believe has no chance of succeeding, other than in bleeding Israel and driving more Israelis to the right politically. We may not like the form it has taken, but can you think of many comparable situations where the government was not more vigorous? Do you think it is fair to publish what you have published on this while you ignore what Muslims have been and are daily doing to Muslims, with deaths every so much more numerous? Or without mention to what is happening elsewhere, like in Mozambique, where at least 100,000 have been killed by rebels supported by South Africa? Of course you can't go into everything, but even if your justification were completely valid, which I think it isn't, you avoid so much you are heavily unbalanced. And that amounts to anti-Semitism. Whether or not you were born a Jew.

Your position also appears to be that it is OK for Jews to be driven from their homes by Arabs, who keep Jewish property (not only homes but women and other property and ~~others~~ sold as slaves) because that was long ago but ~~nothing~~ like that or any rectification today is OK. And you also take the position, in effect, that Jews are the only people in the world who are not entitled to their own homeland, within secure borders. While in much of the world the situation of Jews is ever so much better, in some places, like your native Austria, it remains not so good. Austria, as I understand it, has gone to court in successful efforts to frustrate the return of stolen Jewish property of the Nazi era. There are, throughout the world, Jews who feel that there is no security for them except in their own state, aside from those who have religious interest. Modern history warrants their fear as certainly the decimations of the ages do. That I have no such fear or concern does not mean that I should ignore the concerns of others who do recall the past like that of no other people. Or say that they have no rights or that Israel must be held to standards not applied to others.

I am not questioning your intent but after reading your letter I still believe that you have not given readers of your magazine a fair or a balanced understanding of the situation we agree is terrible.... Have you given any recent thought to the many thousands who, unlike you, were not able to escape even when escape was assured because of the policies and practices of the so-called enlightened states, ours and England in particular and with many Austrians, Switzerland? Do you think this is not in the minds of many Jews today as they assess their own situations? Sincerely, Harold Weisberg

Harold

the Progressive

409 EAST MAIN STREET, MADISON, WI 53703

May 19, 1988

Mr. Harold Weisberg
7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Harold Weisberg:

Thank you for your letter of May 13. I appreciate the concern that prompted you to write, but I must hasten to correct your apparent assumption that I have somehow failed to inform myself about the situation in the Middle East. On the contrary: My interest in Israel and in the Palestinian people verges on the obsessive.

You begin your letter by establishing your credentials as "a non-practicing, first-generation American Jew whose parents could never bring themselves to even mention the kind of lives they lived in the Ukraine and Besarabia." Fair enough. I am a non-practicing immigrant American Jew, born in Vienna, a refugee from the Holocaust much of whose family died in the Nazi death camps. Among the survivors, many of my relatives live now in Israel. Some of them share the perspectives I hold, which you have seen reflected in the pages of The Progressive; others do not.

I have visited the Middle East, have interviewed Israelis and Palestinians of varied backgrounds and perspectives, have reported from the West Bank and Israel. I have read, and continue to read, a great deal about the region (including Paul Johnson's rather disappointing recent history of the Jews). So much for credentials.

You ask whether I have thought about the history of negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Unfortunately, there isn't much history to think of; until very recently, the Palestinian leadership has been unwilling to contemplate negotiations with Israel, and the Israelis have insisted that they "will not negotiate with terrorists"--even though the Israeli government is and has been headed by men who were terrorists when they were fighting for their own homeland. Nonetheless, in the last couple of years there has been a distinct shift in the position of the PLO, a declared willingness to enter into negotiations, and an implied readiness to come to terms with the reality of Israel. There has been no shift whatever in the Israeli position.

You talk about the terrible and tragic fratricide among the Arabs and ask why this isn't dealt with in The Progressive. I'm surprised that the

Harold Weisberg
May 19, 1988

Page 2

reason eludes you: The Progressive is an American magazine published for American readers. Our prime purpose is to provide information and analysis that American citizens can use in assessing and, we hope, influencing the course of events in this country and abroad. We, as Americans, are not responsible for the ghastly crimes committed in the Arab world. We are responsible for the crimes committed by the government of Israel, which is sustained and supported by the U.S. Government and bankrolled by our tax dollars.

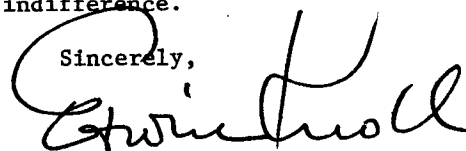
You talk about "the Muslim tyrannies" in the Middle East, and you are absolutely right in characterizing them in that fashion. But Israel is not waging war against those Muslim tyrannies; it is waging war against an impoverished people whose homeland is under occupation, whose homes are bulldozed, whose land is seized by force or filched by legal fraud, and whose perfectly understandable aspirations for self-government are treated with contempt. I'm sure you do not mean to suggest that the villagers of the West Bank and Gaza must pay for the sins of the Saudis and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, let alone for the crimes of the Nazis.

It is one of the terrible ironies of history--and a profound personal tragedy for me--that a people, my people, after suffering thousands of years of persecution, have become persecutors. In Israel, I encountered anti-Arab racism that matches any bigotry I've seen anywhere in the world. If Israel continues on its present course, an Israeli friend told me recently, it will be "Northern Ireland at the bottom and South Africa at the top." That is not the future I want for Israel.

As you suggest, the situation in the Middle East is terribly complex. There is only one dead certainty: the Arabs will always be there. If the Jews want to be there, too, they had better come to terms with that certainty and think in terms of peace, not war.

That's my perspective. You need not share it, of course, but please don't attribute it to ignorance or indifference.

Sincerely,



Erwin Knoll
Editor

EK/tt